

THE TEC PROGRAM INITIATIVE :

Report of an External Evaluation

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List of Acronyms

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AERC	:	African Economic Research Consortium
ASEAN	:	Association of South East Asian Nations
CAPAS	:	Coordinated African Program of Assistance on Services
CARICOM	:	Countries of the Caribbean Community
CENIT	:	Centro de Investigaciones para la Transformacion
CINVE	:	Investigadora, Centro de Investigaciones Economicas
COMESA	:	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CUTS	:	Consumer Unity and Trust Society
FTAA	:	Free Trade Area of the Americas
GFGI	:	Global Financial Governance Initiative
HIV/AIDS	:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IDRC	:	International Development Research Centre
ILO	:	International Labour Organization
LAC	:	Latin American and Caribbean countries
LATN	:	Latin American Trade Network
MENA	:	Middle East and North Africa
Mercosur	:	Customs Union of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay
MIMAP	:	Micro Impact of Macro Adjustment Policies
NAFTA	:	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGOs	:	Non-Government Organisations
OECD	:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PI	:	Program Initiatives
PO	:	Program Officer
Red Mercosur:		TEC Research Network on Mercosur Issues
RSP	:	Research Support Project
SACSNITI	:	South Asian Civil Society Network on International Trade Issues
SATRAN	:	South African Trade Research Network
SEE	:	Social and Economic Equity
SEWA	:	Self Employed Women's Association
TEC	:	Trade, Employment and Competitiveness
TIPS	:	Trade and Industrial Policies Secretariat
VEEM	:	Vietnam Economic and Environment Management Program
VERN	:	Vietnam Economic Research Network
WACATN	:	Western and Central African Trade Network
WTO	:	World Trade Organisation

Executive Summary

TEC is a relatively large and ambitious program. In the period under review, it has used a whole range of strategies to promote policy relevant research, in consonance with the triple objectives of raising indigenous capacity for quality research, increasing the policy relevance of such research, and ensuring the convergence of domestic and international trade policy in developing countries. The output of the PI has been fairly prodigious and also of generally good quality. Given the volatile context of international trade regimes, and the widely diverse quality of research and policy environments within the developing world itself, TEC has had to constantly strive for a balance between relatively longer run research needs and shorter run policy demands on the one hand, and between different objectives, strategies and modalities of functioning on the other. Given the nature of the challenges, the performance of the program in terms of outputs, outreach and outcomes has been commendable.

TEC has incorporated several changes in its functioning based on informed analysis and recommendations of past evaluations. It has for instance acted upon the recommendation of an earlier review and taken active measures to search out niche areas of research around new trade issues. Similarly, it has moved forward with the recommendation of investing ownership and control to southern institutions in a number of new projects. In one area where the Program may still have to respond adequately is the need to focus its activities deeper, perhaps on a smaller number of areas and devise a more finely tuned functional role for itself.

For this purpose, TEC may need to develop a better articulated program design which would help allocate its resources between the many facets and modalities of its diverse portfolio, with the associated risks and gains. Instead of striving for a balance along all dimensions as a goal in itself, it would help the PI to deepen its involvement in a fewer number of thrust areas for greater program effectiveness.

TEC has done well in terms of working with the research community. Its record in persuading Third World researchers to reach out to the policy community in order to ensure better policy relevance of research has been good. TEC may now need to hone its expertise to work with credible NGO's and Civil Society Groups, these being agencies which are becoming increasingly difficult to ignore in international trade negotiation processes.

The TEC Program Initiative: Report of an External Evaluation

I. Introduction

Trade, Employment and Competitiveness, or TEC, is one of the eleven Program Initiatives (PI) currently in operation at IDRC, over and above six Corporate Projects and six Secretariats. It is situated within IDRC's Social and Economic Equity (SEE) program area. TEC is operational in all the three regions of the developing world that IDRC is currently involved in, i.e., South and South East Asia, Middle East and Africa, and Latin America.

In recent years there have been five reviews of work done under the TEC PI: two at the program level, one at the sub-program level or at the level of a conglomerate of projects, and two on two selected projects from the program.¹ The contribution of the PI in terms of bringing together the economics research community to produce credible research on issues centered around international trade and finance *from the perspective of the developing world* has been commended by each. This report is a review of the work done by TEC from April 2000 onwards, in the light of the objectives outlined in the Prospectus of the PI.

There has always been a pronounced bias towards research, as opposed to action programs, within IDRC's activities. This bias towards one end of the spectrum of the developmental agenda over the other is evident in most programs of IDRC, and TEC is no exception to this. The other feature of the TEC research agenda that is worth a mention is the emphasis that is placed on the importance of indigenous capacity building for development research. Both these features of the corporate policy of IDRC are prominent in the design of the TEC PI.

¹ These are "*Trade, Employment and Competitiveness (TEC) Program Initiative : A Review.*", June 1999 by Marilyn Carr and Vijay Vyas, and "*IDRC Program Initiative for Trade Employment and Competitiveness – Report of an External Evaluation*". 15 March, 2001, by Jeffrey C. Fine (ed.), et. al. The evaluation carried out at a level which may best be described as one at the level of a sub-program is the CAPAS evaluation carried out by Dr. Stephen L. Harris and Professor Olu Ajakaiye. The other two reports are on two TEC projects selected for a review exercise carried out by the Evaluation Unit of IDRC on the policy relevance of IDRC research. These are "*A Study of Policy Influence – The G-24 Technical Support Service*", September 2002 by Diana Tussie with Maria Pia Riggirozzi & Tracy Tuplin, and "*The Influence of Research on Policy : An Evaluation ; The Latin American Trade Network : A Case Study*" (Draft report.). Undated.

The current composition of projects in TEC can be partly traced to 1997, if not earlier, when a radical restructuring took place in the internal organization of IDRC. It is reported that TEC came to inherit a number of older projects from that period. Thus it seems that although TEC has evolved a good deal from the profile it had at an earlier time, to a certain extent at least, it has subsumed the structure and content of that profile. The resultant tension is apparent even from the nomenclature of TEC, where the three themes of 'Trade', 'Employment' and 'Competitiveness' are clubbed together, seemingly at par, in the title of the program, although judging by all indicators and as per the perception of the program team itself, trade concerns clearly take precedence over the other two themes of 'Employment' and 'Competitiveness'.

From its inception, TEC has had a strong global component, apart from having regional, and also some national level projects spread over three continents. The current phase of TEC starts from the first of April 2000. There are presently twenty-three active projects on board, and twenty one smaller Research Support Projects, (or RSPs), not counting the ones that are purely travel related. An overwhelmingly large proportion of these twenty one RSP's are geared to program or project development ².

Projects under the TEC PI have been perceived to be of three different varieties.³ The first, and perhaps the most important are the Network-based projects. Secondly there are the 'pure research' projects, which are basically academic and advisory in their thrust, and finally there are projects that try to bring together research and advocacy components through civil society and NGO-based initiatives. Although such a classification of categories may be neither mutually exclusive nor totally exhaustive, it is useful for the purpose of this review in so far as it provides insights into the design and evolution of the program structure.

The major objective of this review is to assess whether or not the TEC PI is meeting the objectives set out in the Prospectus; whether or not these objectives have evolved over time; and if so, how. The review will offer reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of the Program in terms of its thematic approach, the strategies adopted in the context of perceived constraints, and the quality of its achievements in terms of output, reach, and outcome in the context of the field within which the activities of the PI are being carried out. It will also attempt to identify gaps and opportunities, and 'areas of concern', if any, for all stakeholders.

² 'TEC Project Classification for External Review', Gerret Rusnak, 6 May 2003.

³ Briefing from the Project Team at the Ottawa Orientation meeting, April 2003.

II. Objectives of the TEC PI.

II.1 General and specific objectives

The Prospectus of the TEC PI specifies the General Objective of the program as one that would “enable developing countries to participate more effectively in the global economy”.

This broad objective is interpreted as being embodied in three Specific Objectives; namely,

- (a) ‘Improving Developing Countries’ negotiation and bargaining capacities’;
- (b) ‘Contributing to the design of instruments, processes and procedures allowing developing countries to better benefit from global opportunities’; and
- (c) ‘Assisting developing countries to promote coherence between their domestic economic policies and their international trade policies.’

The specific objectives can be looked upon as a set of mutually reinforcing goals. Improving developing countries’ capacity for trade-negotiations and bargaining, is possible on a sustainable basis only if the capacity to produce credible and quality research on trade issues by developing country researchers is enhanced. Successful negotiation at the world forums on a sustainable basis once again requires not only that credible and quality research results are created, but also that these are transmitted in a timely manner and in comprehensible forms, to influence the policy making process in trade and domestic macro economic policy making. Similarly, non-congruence of domestic and international policy concerns can create distortions negating the benefits of trade, as well as weaken the bargaining position of developing countries in the international forums. Thus the three specific objectives can be seen to be mutually reinforcing.

However, while in a timeless, constraint-free environment, the synergies between the three objectives may appear to be high, for a particular project at a given point of time, given limited human and financial resources, there can very well be significant tensions between the three objectives. The one problem that strikes one to be the most relevant in this context, is the issue of indigenous capacity building for trade related research *versus* the need for quick yet credible research based advice for use by trade negotiators. While the first is a lengthy process, requiring long-term commitment, the second depends on ready results. Then again, to the extent credibility of research results is a function of the professional credibility of the researcher(s) concerned, it may be easier to get the requisite research done by well-known and established consultants involved in trade and development related research, a disproportionately large percentage of these may still be Northern or North-based, especially in regions where research capacities and research environment continue to be “weak”, to the detriment of the objective of building indigenous capacity for such research. Thus in real time, there are clear tensions in so far as these two specific objectives are concerned.

Yet with proper planning and foresight, and some imagination, some of these tensions and trade-offs can indeed be synergized into win-win situations. The task assigned to the Evaluation Team is to assess how the TEC PI has handled these inner tensions and the extent to which it has progressed towards reaching these objectives, singly and in tandem with one another.

II.2 The congruence of general and specific objectives

It may be noted that the three specific objectives of the TEC PI, together, do not quite map the same space that is spanned by the General Objective of the PI in its totality. For example, all three specific objectives are geared towards working *with* developing country researchers and policy makers to promote developing country interests in the area of international trade. Yet one could conceive of ways of “enabling developing countries to participate more effectively in the global economy”, which is how the General Objective has been phrased, through substantive participation of Northern researchers, i.e., in ways that fall outside the space that the three specific objectives together aim to define.

In this context it may be noted, as is also mentioned in the TEC Prospectus, areas of common interest are no longer clearly and immutably divided between Northern and Southern countries as such, but transcend national boundaries to form interest groups across geographical borders. One can cite several examples of agencies which have successfully chosen to work across North-South borders to promote developing country interests.⁴

In an area such as that of international trade, it is natural that there would have to be some degree of Northern participation. TEC itself has used substantive Northern expertise in many of its current and past projects, although from the experience it has had in this respect, it is clear that there can be tensions in deciding on the right mix.⁵ By and large the global projects of TEC are skewed towards Northern participation, and for good reasons. The question of what is the ideal North-South mix cannot be answered unilaterally for all projects in the TEC portfolio under all circumstances. It has to be decided on a case to case basis, with the proviso that *ceteris paribus*, Southern institutions and Southern researchers get priority over their Northern counterparts. In doing so, it would be

⁴ See for instance the Oxfam International's 'Make Trade Fair' campaign which works with governments and civil society across North-South borders and is focused on the trading interests of economically vulnerable groups in developing countries. Although it is the activist facet of the Oxfam initiative that has got the maximum media attention, especially in the wake of the recent failure of the Cancun Ministerial meeting to reach a consensus, Oxfam has also been involved in gathering ground level evidence on the impoverishing effect of trade on the poor in developing countries.

⁵ An example of this North-South mix with a heavy bias towards the former is the project on Consumers International which is based in England and is by and large being run by Northern researchers. Although the project is expected to spread to regional offices in developing countries, to be managed by Southern researchers, this process is yet to begin. Project GFGI is also heavily North-centric. The other example is the G-24 project which has been a very influential and long-running project in the TEC portfolio. The tensions associated with the recent North-leaning shift in the perceived ownership and control in this important project reflects some of these problems.

useful if the ambiguity created by the non-congruence of the domains spanned by General and Specific Objectives of the PI is resolved. This is likely to make the contentious job of striking the right mix somewhat easier for the PI.

II.3 Program versus Project objectives

There is one more general point that needs to be noted at the outset. At any point of time, a program is *manifested* in the sum total of the projects. However, a program is more than a mere aggregation of its component projects. Ideally, the design of the Program area should define the arena within which individual projects are conceived and implemented. The perimeters of that 'grand' design are set by the objectives of the PI, along with a visualization of the strategies, that may be adopted to achieve quality products and processes, and the nature of constraints that the PI may have to work under. Individual projects can be looked upon as building blocks that are aimed at filling in the slots in the big design in a coordinated and orderly fashion, so that over their respective project lives, each project, individually as well as in consonance with other projects within the program initiative, move towards fulfilling the overall program objectives.

For a reviewer therefore, it is important to understand the underlying program design. However, unless the program design is fully spelt out, a program review invariably becomes a review of individual projects, singly and as a group, in terms of their progress towards achieving the program objectives. Although the TEC PI has an elegant and elaborately written out Prospectus, it still needs a fully articulated program design which spells out the strategic options available to it under diverse contexts, along with the risks and benefits associated with the choices it can make, and provides guidance in the choice of projects in a dynamic setting.

Yet on the basis of the documents supplied to the reviewers, interviews of key informants, and the few in-depth case studies undertaken for the purpose of this review, it is clear that an implicit and inarticulated program design does exist and that it has indeed guided the thinking and strategization of the TEC PI. This can be inferred from the minutes of the many internal meetings that the TEC PI has held over the last couple of years, the tacit prioritization of Program activities that is manifested in the diverse projects under different situations that are being carried out under the PI, and the choice of strategies that have been adopted under different contexts. Such strategization could only have taken place on the basis of assessment of the nature of constraints, the expected outcomes, as well as the risks involved in individual situations. It may be useful to spell these out in a systematic manner to assist the PI to take decisions on future activities more effectively.

III. Review Methodology

Program and project evaluation is an essential tool for monitoring project performance. But no foolproof method exists for evaluating performance. A

program does not operate in a vacuum. So technically speaking there is the ever present problem of counterfactuals and of potentially illegitimate ascriptions, both positive and negative. This is especially so where the component projects are embedded in a complex and continuously evolving environment, which most TEC projects are. Besides, TEC is a relatively large PI and the constituent projects operate under very diverse environments. Under such conditions, a performance evaluation exercise has to contend not just with a set of indicators but actually with a set of distributions.

Nevertheless the standard practice in such exercises has been to think in terms of two or at most three-dimensional matrices, with various performance indicators mapped out against data sources associated with perceived quality of and weights given to each. Such a structure has the advantage of keeping the relevant parameters in sight.

Given these caveats, the performance indicators that the review has looked at are:

- The quality of research output (technical rigor, analytical clarity and content)
- Policy influence (readability and timeliness of outputs, dissemination efforts, policy relevance and policy impact)
- Outcomes (in terms of the nature and extent of involvement of the target audience, in terms of observed changes in the behavior, actions and way of thinking of stakeholders), and
- Outreach (the extent to which the intended audience has been reached).

The evidence on which the assessment has been based has come from three different sources. The first, and for some purposes the most important data source for this review has been desk based scrutiny of documents of various kinds. This has been the main source for the output indicators, as well as for assessing some dimensions of policy influence and outreach.⁶

The second source for data has been interviews with key informants within and outside IDRC.⁷ Among key informants from outside IDRC, interviews were held with project coordinators and other project personnel, and a few outside experts and policy makers. The interviews were valuable for obtaining a better understanding of the program, to get an insight into the process of evolution that the PI has been undergoing and to triangulate the information obtained from the documents at the program and project levels.

Finally, field visits were made by the two reviewers to get an in-depth understanding of the program at the level of projects.⁸ These were invaluable as a major source of evidence for all the performance indicators, especially for the outcome indicators. In all four projects were selected for in-depth analysis. The population of on-going projects under the TEC PI provided the base for

⁶ For a list of the documents scanned, see Annex I of this report.

⁷ For a list of persons interviewed, see Annex II of the report.

⁸ Cf Annex III.

choosing the case studies. Sampling strategy has been purposive, with due emphasis given to the criteria of variability and representativeness. The final selection was done in consultation with the Evaluation Unit of IDRC and the Team Leader of the program on the basis of a combination of factors.

Since Networks are used extensively as a strategy for attaining TEC program objectives, two of the leading networks in Latin America, LATN and MERCOSUR, were chosen for in-depth review. A field trip to Buenos Aires and Montevideo was undertaken by both the reviewers for this purpose. In addition, one of the reviewers went to Zambia in Africa to examine the Network-based project COMESA, while the other went to Vietnam in Asia to examine the VERN project.

The VERN project in Vietnam was selected as an example of an innovative country project that has utilized the experience of nearly a decade of IDRC involvement in that country. Although a relatively recent entrant to the TEC PI, VERN was chosen for in-depth analysis for the special features it has in a country situation that is marked by low levels of indigenous capacity for research in economics and a very challenging environment in terms of the research-policy interface.

The field studies provided a major source of information on how the TEC PI is operating on the ground. In particular, it enabled the reviewers to have a better understanding of the nature of ground level constraints that the PI faces, the extent to which the PI has, or has not, succeeded in tackling these and the manner in which it has been able to steer the program towards specified program objectives. It has also been a major source of information on the outcomes of the PI.

IV. Progress towards reaching the objectives

TEC PI has been making steady progress towards the general objective of raising the effectiveness of developing countries' participation in the global economy. This is being done primarily through the process of strengthening the negotiating ability of the partners. The major input has been in terms of investment in raising the potential quality of debates through relevant research in trade policy matters and its dissemination to the policy making community and other stakeholders.

The PI has evolved in a number of ways in the last three years. While trade policy continues to be the major focus, the program has moved towards a relatively greater emphasis on domestic policies during the period under review, such as the emphasis it has placed since 2002 on projects centering around domestic Competition Policies. This is being done with a view to attaining coherence between domestic and trade policies, which is the third specific objective of the project. The other area in which the PI has made progress is in terms of ensuring greater policy relevance of the research. There is now relatively much greater emphasis on those activities that reach out to policy makers as compared to earlier times. This is evident from the higher effort that

is being spent in recent times on developing short and user-friendly policy relevant material, such as policy briefs and newsletters, for dissemination to a larger audience.

In view of the changing nature of trade negotiations, as observed in Seattle and more recently in Cancun, there is also a greater awareness in the program team on the need for bringing NGO's and civil society groups into effective partnership within the TEC program. TEC does not currently have many projects with substantive NGO involvement. There is a wide area of new opportunities and new challenges here which may be profitably explored by TEC.

IV.1 Output : Quality, quantity, and efficiency

A number of factors need to be considered for making a fair assessment of the quality and effectiveness of the output of a program. These include the initial conditions with respect to the quality of the research environment the work is embedded in to start with, as well as an assessment of the distance and the nature of the terrain covered to produce the output. It is not fair to apply the same yardsticks of 'quality' to all projects independent of the environment within which they operate. In addition, some of the projects that fall within the purview of this review may have a history of TEC or IDRC involvement that go way back beyond 1st of April 2000, which is the cut-off date for this review. Often the current phase of such a project will build on the strengths and weaknesses of the earlier phases. Any assessment of the current phase will therefore have to take that history into account. Given such caveats, by and large the output of the PI has been prodigious, and generally, of good quality.

The output of the PI has taken a variety of forms : books, discussion papers, research reports, newsletters, policy briefs, summary research findings and brochures of various kinds. In consonance with the objectives of the PI, the documents emerging out of the PI include research material on both international trade and relevant domestic policy issues. Books from the PI are mostly edited volumes of individual papers, sometimes around a single theme, sometimes only a collection of papers without a running theme or structure. Policy briefs package relevant information in concise and non-technical formats for the use of policy makers and the general public. Most projects have also depended on developing web-sites and disseminating information through the internet. Apart from these, a range of other activities such as training courses, national and international conferences and focused meetings with targeted audience have formed part of the output from the Program.

Research outputs from some of the predominantly academic projects like Red MERCOSUR would qualify for front ranks in the area of trade-related research in Latin America in terms of technical rigor. This is not quite the case for some of the research output from projects such as SATRN or COMESA in Africa. LATN, which is less of a purely academic project as compared to MERCOSUR, has also produced a large number of working papers and policy briefs which are generally of very good quality and have been disseminated widely.

Sometimes, however, the output of some projects can be difficult to delineate precisely. For example, in case of the COMESA project, it is clear that one of the outputs has been the creation of direct links between the COMESA secretariat, and some of the best available researchers that the project has helped to identify. The COMESA secretariat has regularly bypassed the project by commissioning directly some policy studies to some of these researchers, now used explicitly as consultants. In this example, the IDRC project may be viewed as having funded the sunk cost of creating the list of names of consultants that the COMESA secretariat needed for helping it to fulfil its tasks. This is a positive contribution towards reaching the objectives of the TEC PI, which cannot be evaluated in terms of so many printed pages. Similar comments can be made on the nature of contribution that TEC, and IDRC in general, has made in developing the environment for, and boosting the quality of, economics research in Africa through projects like TIPS and AERC.

It is difficult to assess the efficiency of a program in the absence of clearly specified norms. Efficiency is a function not merely of the quantity and quality of effort spent but also of the initial conditions and the environment within which the program takes shape. Clearly the level of staff involvement will have to be higher to reach a certain level of output quality where the base is weaker. G-24 needed very little of the IDRC staff time because of the high technical expertise of the project partners. There the nature of involvement of TEC expertise had been in the area of astute assessment and identification of critical needs, which made it all happen. In comparison, projects like VERN would have needed higher involvement of staff time per se, and resources. Without assigning some notional weights to the costs and benefits in these two contrasting scenarios, needing different kinds of staff involvement, it would be difficult to make a relative evaluation of the two. Over and above this problem of relative ordering, in the absence of a frontier function that can be used as a yardstick for measuring efficiency, there is the knotty problem of judging the absolute level of efficiency of either.

Although it may not be possible to assign a quantitative measure of efficiency, and the variability in the quality and effectiveness of the output, based on the observed results of the past three years, this review team feels that, the TEC PI has made commendable progress in terms of outputs towards the three specific objectives of the program as enunciated in the Prospectus.

IV.2 Reach and outcome

For a number of reasons, including the fact that research-based policy making is time intensive, a three-year review may be unable to capture the impact of the program by simply looking at outputs. Besides, for a review that spans a three year period, the time may be much too short for a lot of outputs to be ready for review. In such cases, one would have to assess the nature of *processes*, or *outcomes*, that may have been generated under the program initiative. Even in cases where tangible outputs like publications are present, it is important to understand the dynamics of program activities in order to assess the nature of changes that the TEC PI may have brought about in the research and policy

making environment and capability in developing countries, in changing the perceptions, attitudes and behavior of project partners. Therefore one has to gauge answers to questions like:

- What processes have been put in place to ensure that the program objectives are obtained ;
- How extensive has been the reach and impact of the processes and outcomes ;
- What measures have been taken to ensure stability and sustainability of such processes.

A major outcome of the TEC program initiative has been the forging of links within the research community to orient the community towards coordinated research on international trade-related issues in situations where the basic research expertise had already existed to a certain extent. This is evident in projects like LATN and MERCOSUR. In situations where such expertise did not exist to start with, such as in the African continent, TEC, and IDRC has helped develop such expertise and linkages. Examples can be cited from projects like SATRN, COMESA or even AERC. History has had a major role to play in case of the last two, which are both 'old' and co-funded projects. But the contribution that TEC, and IDRC, has made to the process of developing indigenous research capability around trade related issues is widely recognized.

One of the major process outcomes of the project has been to link up 'weaker' partners and environments with stronger ones to reap scale economies and to benefit from demonstration effects. Inclusion of Paraguay within MERCOSUR, and linking up Central America with LATN are two examples of how this is being done.

In a new project (VERN) which has been built on the decade-old experience of an old project in Vietnam (VEEM), through a system of open call for research proposals on the net, TEC has managed to introduce a measure of competition and transparency in the economics research community where nothing of its kind was prevalent earlier.

The linkages between research and policy making are complex. Some TEC projects may be seen to have stimulated not only the supply of policy-oriented research, but also the demand for it. This is a crucial step, whereby researchers and policy makers learn to coordinate their efforts for informed policy decisions. While the MERCOSUR project resulted in more books being published, the COMESA one seems to have resulted in more reports being read by the target civil servants. However there may be large gaps between reading documents, internalizing their content, and acting on the information and messages thus internalized. It can be argued convincingly that democratic debate is more lively in the MERCOSUR countries than in the COMESA ones. The books published by the MERCOSUR project would have reached a much wider educated elite, one that matters in the democratic process.

What is clearly visible though is that through its persistent efforts, TEC has persuaded the research community to make available results of their research

through proper dissemination methods to facilitate informed policy making. This is already evident from the output profile of the program. Also, during the discussions these reviewers have had with project personnel during the field visits in Latin America, it was mentioned that the gentle yet unobtrusive persuasion by the resident TEC PO has been one of the main factors behind the higher efforts that they are currently putting into production of policy briefs and generally raising the policy relevance of their research.

Also, by making the demand for some policy-oriented research solvent, these projects help sustain an on-going profession of economic research in some of these countries. This was mentioned to the reviewers in the interviews, for example in Latin America, where Universities do not pay a living salary to their faculty. In the case of the COMESA project, some of the African consultants were identified as alumni (so to speak) of the AERC project. This is important for making the efforts by researchers to improve their standards, and investing seriously in learning of new techniques and ideas worthwhile.

As part of IDRC policy, TEC has also been insisting on incorporation of gender in project activities. However, this has not resulted in genuine gender 'mainstreaming' of TEC projects in any substantive manner as yet. This could be because of the nature of most of the current projects in the TEC portfolio, where 'people' as such are not very visible, so that gender concerns also do not necessarily figure in the research agenda in an organic manner.

However, although for one reason or another, mainstreaming of gender is yet to come in the TEC program as a whole, what seems to have happened is that TEC has succeeded *in raising awareness* among project partners about 'gender' as an issue needing special attention. This is commendable in itself because this has happened in situations where no such awareness existed earlier. This came out from the discussions during field visits where project personnel specifically drew the attention of the reviewers to the fact that there are women in their research teams. However, it is still unclear whether or not they are genuinely convinced about the need for looking at the gender dimension of their research agenda wherever it may be a relevant dimension to look at. Perhaps the TEC PI may wish to assist the research teams with ideas in this respect.

By and large, TEC has done well in terms of process outcomes. Results can be seen from the emergence of an indigenous research community in Africa engaged in international trade issues, from the gelling together of existing research community around international trade and finance related themes in Latin America, and in the visible beginnings of the value of networking, and of a transparent process of conducting research even in a country like Vietnam which has had no culture of open discourse. The sustained effort by the program management to bolster indigenous capabilities and ownership has over the years begun to bear fruit.

IV.3 Relevance : For policy-makers and other stakeholders

One of the major objectives of the TEC PI is to ensure policy relevance of research undertaken. Assessing the impact of research on policy is not an easy

affair. There are far too many variables that can affect the result and far too many imponderables can derail the process of transmission.

In focusing on stakeholders other than southern researchers as intended beneficiaries of TEC, such as the policy making community and the civil society, there is evidence that in the last few years TEC has taken steps to focus more systematically on these segments. This is evident from the much more pronounced emphasis in TEC projects now on reaching out to policy makers through policy briefs and in increasing the dissemination of research results to the larger community through much more intensive use of the internet. The need for both these modes of dissemination were strongly emphasized by the Fine (2000) review of the TEC PI. That review had noted that most of the TEC projects evaluated by the team had not done very well in terms of efforts toward dissemination, especially to stakeholders other than the researchers involved in TEC projects : that they have mostly focused on seminars and workshops.⁹

Recent reviews of both G-24 and LATN, the two TEC projects which were selected to study the influence of research on policy of TEC projects, suggest that the extent of direct influence of TEC funded research on policy making has been minimal. Both proclaim that there is no evidence that such research has been demand-driven to start with. Rather, the thrust in the projects has been to create demand and to increase the knowledge base, 'enlighten' the stakeholders, expand the agenda, lay bare the options, in order that better and more informed policy decisions can be taken.

Three years down the line, there is still not much evidence of any substantive direct impact of TEC funded research on policy making as such. What has happened though is that the PI has made conscious and successful efforts to strengthen its dissemination efforts, as is clear from the outputs of projects such as LATN, not merely to target policy makers in their intended audience¹⁰ by disseminating material directly and involving them in seminars and meetings, but also to systematically augment their efforts to produce small briefing notes, publish abridged versions of findings from forthcoming working papers, news briefs etc. and post the relevant material on a substantially revamped project website. MERCOSUR, which is a more academically oriented project as compared to LATN, has also been investing time and effort to produce brochures, briefing notes and abridged research findings in readable form for the benefit of the larger audience. There is very clearly a shift in the allocation of efforts towards more policy-oriented outputs in projects of older vintage. This is apparent not merely from a scanning of the output profile of these projects but also from the interviews one has had with project personnel during the field trips that were conducted.

In contrast, a project like VERN, perhaps because of its special environmental characteristics, has been almost wholly focused on research. The project is being managed by the Institute of Economics in Hanoi. The primary objective of this project has been to build indigenous research capacity and to put in place a

⁹ See pages 31-33, External Review of TEC PI , by Fine et.al.,2000.

¹⁰ Purportedly with a focus on middle level ones, as described in a Technical Report submitted to IDRC by the project team.

transparent research environment with adequate emphasis on building up young talent in the country. It does so through putting out calls for proposals, and passing them through a selection process. The project has engaged two external consultants, who are involved in the selection process and also provide technical support through out various stages of the selected projects.¹¹ This is a very good example of vesting ownership to Southern researchers while ensuring quality and rigor of the output through involvement of outside experts : a modality that the Fine review had also recommended.

There has been no attempt at the call for proposal stage in this project to get proposals on themes or issues that may be considered of immediate 'policy relevance' in Vietnam, such as the distributional consequences of trade liberalization which has been mentioned by senior Vietnamese researchers during the field visit to Hanoi as a 'burning issue' currently in the country. Consequently research studies under VERN range over widely disparate themes. Distributional issues figure only incidentally in a couple of the six projects selected. If at the stage of call for proposals, one had chosen a topic of policy relevance, it would have been possible to make available a body of coordinated research on different facets of an issue which would have been of topical interest for policy makers. A personal interview in Hanoi with Dr. Nam, who is one of the few politically influential persons in the country straddling the dual realms of academic research and policy making, left this reviewer with the impression that evidence based on good quality research conducted by Vietnamese researchers themselves, and not by outside agencies, would be looked upon as potentially very useful input into the policy making process, however obscure and non-transparent the process may appear to be to the world outside the Polit Bureau.¹²

Research can influence policy in different ways and in different stages of the process. It can expand capacities, broaden the scope of public debates, which may or may not result in changing the nature of existing programs. TEC projects may not have had much impact on policy making through direct channels, but they have been contributing to a better policy making environment through their knowledge generating and enlightenment functions.

IV.4 Including Gender Perspectives

Currently three projects in TEC directly address the question of gender. These are:

- The Knowledge Networking Program on Engendering Macro-Economics and International Economics - Global Training Program on Gender.
- International Trade and Gender in East Africa.

¹¹ VERN is currently one of the very few projects in TEC which operates through a tender. TEC itself does not use this mode for project selection.

¹² Dr. Do Hoai Nam is currently the President of the National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities and is the former Director of the Institute of Economics where the VERN project is located. He is also a Member of the National Assembly and a Member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam which is the apex policy making body in Vietnam.

- International Competitiveness in the Moroccan Garment Industry.

The first one is a training program in Feminist Economics for macro economists from Southern countries being run by feminist economists from the North. The second and the third look at the impact of international trade on the labour markets, including informal segments of the labour market which have significant presence of women workers. The new research project on 'Globalization, Labour Markets and Inequality in Asia' is also expected to analyze gender dis-aggregated data in three selected countries in Asia using secondary information.

The training program is expected to initiate a group of Southern researchers into some of the intricacies of international economics and macro economics from a feminist view point. During the training, the trainees are also expected to write empirical term papers on gender relevant themes. While it is useful to have such an exposure, it is as yet too early to judge what the effectiveness of this project is going to be. If it can persuade a fraction of the trainees to genuinely 'mainstream' gender concerns in their future work, it would have served its purpose. This only time can tell. However, given that the overt manifestations of gender bias generally happen to be very context-specific, this is one case where situating this project in a wholly a northern environment may have been avoided to ensure greater effectiveness of the effort.

For most other projects in the TEC portfolio outside the ones mentioned above, gender is not an issue. This may be partly due to the nature of the large majority of the projects in TEC, which may appear to preclude the necessity for the inclusion of gender issues in a natural organic manner. However, the strong emphasis that IDRC places on the gender component of projects appears to have had some impact. One visible effect of this has been the conscious attempts on the part of the project personnel to induct women researchers in their projects.

During the field trips to project sites in Argentina, Uruguay and Vietnam, project personnel specifically drew the attention of the reviewers to the efforts that have gone into inducting women researchers in their activities. LATN of course is headed by an eminent woman researcher. Here more emphasis has gone into efforts to get young researchers, both men and women, into the Network. The principal actors in MERCOSUR are men, but attention was drawn to specific instances of researchers in the Network who happen to be of the right gender. In Vietnam some research teams selected under the VERN project have women researchers. One is headed by a woman. A couple of the selected projects under the VERN project also propose to do some gender analysis in their research studies.

Yet with some effort, TEC could perhaps get better results by way of mainstreaming gender in its projects. Evidence from field visits suggests that partners would be willing to consider this added dimension in their research agenda, provided one, they are convinced that gender is an important issue to look at and two, if they knew how to go about doing sensible gender analysis. In Vietnam, great interest was shown by the research teams and the Institute of

Economics to know how best to incorporate gender in their activities. There are projects in the TEC portfolio where this could have been done without much trouble. The TEC team might consider pushing the gender agenda at least in some of their projects, perhaps through gentle persuasion as has been done in the case of enhancing the policy relevance of TEC research, coupled with practical suggestions on how best it can be done in specific contexts. In some cases this could have been done through explicit announcements on preference for gender relevant analysis, other things remaining the same, during calls for proposals, as for instance in the case of the VERN project which operates through tenders.

IV.5 Use of Evaluation

TEC has taken note of past reviews and their recommendations seriously. This is evident from the deliberations in the team meetings. The several Project and Program Development workshops that TEC has conducted in that last three years also bear testimony to this.

The Fine review had made specific suggestions on improving the dissemination efforts of TEC projects. The fact that this suggestion has been taken seriously is evident from the substantial increase in the share of policy briefs, newsletters and web sites aimed at better dissemination to a larger audience, with a focus on policy makers. Working 'evaluatively' is also evident in the care that the PI has taken to develop projects in niche areas such as Competition Policy or Trade in Services: something that the earlier review had strongly recommended.

At the same time it is clear that the program has not blindly followed all the suggestions that the review had made. Contrary to the recommendations of the review, TEC has desisted from moving in a big way into "countries that matter", although there is evidence of moving into some activities in these. The other suggestion made by the 2000 review to the effect that given its limited resources TEC should move out of "weaker research environments" has not happened in any appreciable manner: once again perhaps with good reason.

The strength of TEC and of IDRC has been in steady and consistent support for building indigenous research capacity, often under trying circumstances. The risks are admittedly high, and the gestation periods are long, but given consistent mentoring, the returns can be exceptionally high as well, both in terms of genuine capacity building where there is a need and in terms of the enormous store of goodwill that IDRC has generated for itself in the research community of developing countries around the world.¹³ *But considering the time and effort it takes to make things happen in 'weaker environments', TEC should take a closer look at whether it should have its presence in as many projects and areas in these as it currently does.*

¹³ It was heartening to hear from representatives of all the partnering organizations without exception, in all the field visits this reviewer had made, that "IDRC is 'special'."

The TEC team has taken the suggestion of the Fine Review to tag on weaker regions/networks with stronger ones. The new initiative in Central America is not a stand-alone piece. It has been tagged on to LATN to benefit by association. This is a very good strategy which is likely to be more efficient in raising quality and also be more cost effective.

The recommendations made by the earlier review in the form of an issues/functions matrix have also not been taken up by TEC. Although the specific suggestions made therein may have been examined and not acted upon by the Team for good reason, there may be value in the way of looking at things in the manner suggested by the Fine Evaluation. It could be helpful in articulating the options and strategies that should be considered by the Team within a larger articulated program design.

The CAPAS evaluation had several recommendations to make, the most important of them being the need for a narrower focus of the research program and a scaling down of the regional spread of the program within Africa; something that is in common with one of the recommendations of the Fine Review as well. This also does not seem to have happened in the TEC program, but it is something that the Team may wish to reconsider in future.

It is evident from the manner in which the PI has evolved over time that the Team had given due consideration to the suggestions and recommendations made by the earlier reviews; that some suggestions were taken up in the activities of the PI in very proactive ways, some others would have been considered but not acted upon, one presumes, for good reasons.

V. Strategies and Constraints

V.1 Program Strategies

Strategization in the context of the design, development and implementation of programs, cannot be done in a vacuum. It acquires meaning and content only in the context of the 'adopted' set of program objectives on the one hand and the perception of constraints, internal as well as external, on the other. Some strategies are visualized at the design stage; others need to be developed as implementation proceeds, new knowledge and information comes up, and new constraints and opportunities emerge. A 'live' program is a dynamic entity. It involves constant analysis of new opportunities and constraints and readily responds to new situations.

All strategization presupposes the existence and feasibility of choice, or of options. A good program design needs to spell out, if not in full detail, at least in broad outlines, an assessment of risks and gains associated with the available alternatives as a basis for the choice of strategic options, at the time of drawing up the basic design, and over time, as the program develops.

Unlike the program 'objectives' of the TEC PI, which are spelt out in clear terms in the Prospectus, program 'strategies' for TEC are not equally well defined.

There is no clear notion for instance on the assessment of risk, something that is intrinsic to the concept of strategy. Nor does it provide any guidance on the relative weights to be given to projects that are considered to be 'risky', or 'experimental' or those that have to operate in 'weaker environments.' While the Prospectus does indicate a range of "strategic interventions" that the TEC program is expected to follow in the period 2000 to 2004, these are in effect a mixed bag of animals. Some are strategies proper (some derived from successful experiences in the earlier phases of TEC such as extending the scope of Cross Country Trade Networks at the regional level and developing "TIPS-Like" projects at the national levels etc.); some others are issues, old and new (pushing forward the agenda on global financial issues, development of "niche" research agendas such as in trade in services and Competition Policy etc.) and yet others are suggested new geographical areas of operation (expanding TEC presence in Asia, initiating activities in the Caribbean and Central America, etc.). All of these have been utilized by TEC in program activities.

There are several factors that make the work of the TEC PI particularly challenging. Not the least of them is the diversity of the research and policy environment within which it places itself, which varies widely between different continents, and within the same continent, between different regions and countries. There is therefore no unique set of strategies that it can, or should, follow, nor is it possible, or desirable, to retain the same balance, regionally, between the three specific objectives outlined in the Prospectus. The second factor is the fast changing global trade scenario, its current contours and the likely future developments, which in a way defines the gamut of *issues* that TEC selects from. The volatility of the negotiating scenario also poses challenge. This requires that there is systematic monitoring of developments at the global level, identifying the gaps that exist in the informed analysis of issues and upcoming research areas that are likely to become important in future. These are factors that TEC has to live with and address as best as it can.

The somewhat undefined and shifting environment within which TEC works makes it all the more imperative that it outlines for itself a more fully articulated program design than is spelt out in the Prospectus. Many features of it already exist, albeit implicitly, in the ideas that are behind the deliberations recorded in the minutes of the various PI meetings and examples of which were apparent from the discussions with, and communications from, the TEC Team and the Team Leader in particular. It would make the work of the program easier and more efficient if such a design exists to facilitate *project* development activities on which the team spends so much effort and that in the ultimate analysis, provide substance and content to the *program*.

Apart from articulating the implicit ideas that the team clearly has on this, another source to draw upon would be the earlier review done by Fine et.al. where the reviewers had identified a range of *functions* and *issues* that TEC could identify for itself. TEC need not follow the specific recommendations on the Issues/Functions matrix outlined in that Review. It can devise its own parameters. But the advantage of such a scheme is clear articulation. It certainly cuts down on the need to go over the same ground over and over again.

One of the TEC priorities, if not explicitly articulated, but something that is implicit in the way it functions is, 'balance'. This is apparent from the distribution of TEC projects not merely over the 'specific' objectives, but also over their regional distribution of projects across the regions it operates.¹⁴ It is interesting to know that a balanced distributional outcome of projects along both dimensions emerged as an ex post phenomenon, and was not the result of any conscious and overt decision taken ex ante on the preferred relative weights of these at the program level.

It appears that without articulating it explicitly, TEC has taken an implicit decision to work for balance per se, along not one, but several dimensions simultaneously. The Team has to decide for itself to what extent it wants to, indeed needs to, do this implicit balancing and along which specific dimensions. It may wish to consider if it should let go of balance along some dimensions to achieve greater effectiveness for the program as a whole.

V.1.1 Networks, national and regional projects, new themes, new areas

Going through the list of "strategies" that are mentioned in the Prospectus, one can see that many of these have indeed been taken up in the current phase of TEC. In consonance with the strategy of developing regional trade networks, new phases of LATN AND MERCOSUR have been put on board. As an example of new initiative at the national level, the VERN project in Vietnam has been developed like a "TIPS-like" project with an intelligently conceived and context-specific structure. The Hanoi based Institute of Economics has been designated as the core organisation with full ownership. A similar project in Uganda has been conceptualized, but is still to take off.

The importance of international financial issues has led to the formulation and implementation of the Global Financial Initiative Project comprising of three working groups: one examining short term issues centered on the causes of and responses to financial crises; the second looking at longer term issues like social safety nets, Overseas Development Assistance and long term capital flows; and the third centered around the question of democratic governance in international financial institutions : an area which is likely to become increasingly important in the post-Cancun era.

One of the strategies mentioned in the Prospectus for this phase of TEC was also to spread to new geographical areas of operation. This has been done through projects like 'Central America in the World Economy of the 21st Century' and 'Competition Issues in CARICOM'. To explore possibilities of moving into non-traditional areas, the PI has started new projects on competitiveness and competition policy ('Promoting Competitive Markets in Developing Economies, Competition, Efficiency and Competition Policy in the MENA Region, International Competitiveness in the Moroccan Garment Industry, Competition

¹⁴ Presentation by Joeques and Rusnak at the TEC Annual Meeting in Paris, May 2003.

Issues in CARICOM, etc.). A workshop under RSP on 'Research Needs and Priorities on Trade and Health Services in LAC' indicates that trade in services is likely to be an emerging area of research within the TEC program.

V.1.2 Multidisciplinary and promoting inter-PI linkages

The Prospectus also visualises the strategies of adopting multi-disciplinary research and developing inter-PI linkages. On both fronts, TEC's achievements so far appear to have been somewhat less spectacular than perhaps in other dimensions of its activities. As for multi-disciplinarity of research, the choice of topics in the portfolio of TEC may have pre-empted the choice of methodology, since most of the research projects are within the domain of traditional economic analysis, although projects like LATN does combine expertise in several disciplines. The rationale for adopting the strategy of developing inter-PI linkages may be visualized in terms of factors such as economies on staff time and benefits of cross fertilization of knowledge and expertise across programs.

Within TEC, one area where some inter-PI linkages have been sought to be developed is gender, an example of which is the recently initiated project on 'Knowledge Networking Program on Engendering Macro-Economics and International Economics': a training program targeted to young economists in the interface of TEC and MIMAP. Such interfacing through training programs can be relatively easily done for cross-cutting themes like gender and may be explored in other areas as well. It will be more challenging to strategize for inter-PI linkages in the design of the core projects of TEC, and it is a challenge that is worth taking up, given the overarching reach of the PI eloquently enunciated in the TEC Prospectus itself.

V.1.3 Working with NGOs

The Prospectus suggests that one of the modalities that TEC needs to consider is to work with NGOs and civil society groups. This makes sense in the context of the changing nature of trade negotiations, where these groups are becoming an increasingly prominent and vocal force to reckon with. In view of the fact that TEC's major partner has been, and continues to be, the research community, the question is how TEC should equip itself to handle the challenge of working with this new breed of partners.

There is evidence that in the period under review TEC has indeed taken some bold steps to take on the challenge. It has attempted to do so primarily through projects that are channeled through NGOs, such as the South Asian Civil Society Network on International Trade Issues (SACSNITI) which works through networking and uses NGO advocacy instruments. The other project which has been recently initiated in this group is the interestingly designed global project on 'Exploring Opportunities for International Cooperation Towards a Sustainable Commodity Sector-A Case Study in Coffee'. Apart from this, individual TEC-

supported network projects like LATN II have involved NGOs in their activities. The recent meeting organized by LATN on Labor Standards for instance, had brought together NGOs along with academic researchers and government officials in the same forum to discuss labor rights issues in an increasingly globalizing world.¹⁵

Apart from the increasing prominence of NGOs and civil society groups in trade-related issues, there are a number of reasons why it may be important that TEC has an ear open to the polyphonous voice of this community. Because at least some among these enjoy a close proximity to people, these groups are often better informed and better placed to articulate ground level concerns than either government officials or academic researchers. At the same time, they may have less understanding of the larger picture or have little access to informed analysis. Like the other major stakeholders of TEC, access to well-reasoned and unbiased information is vital for them as well.

NGOs can bring fresh insights and open up new facets to research and policy debates. There are many instances of well motivated NGOs making valuable contributions to both the process of policy formulation at the national and international levels and to the process of identification of vital gaps in research efforts. SEWA in India, which is an NGO of poor working women, has been one of the major forces behind the passing of the ILO Convention on Home-based Workers and has used this as an instrument for lobbying with the Government of India to pass national legislation on informal sector workers. SEWA has also been involved in initiating useful research in the area of social security for unorganized sector workers.

The set of research issues that TEC has drawn from, including the 'niche' areas of research that it has been moving into in recent times, while being of particular relevance to developing countries, also happen to be mostly those on which there has been pressure for compliance from the North. These include issues such as Competition Policy, IPRs or labour standards. Listening to the voices of civil society groups and NGOs from the South may open up the domain of discourse to include other issues of special interest to the developing world, some of which are being voiced by these groups. These may need systematic investigation as well to pave the way for a smooth dialogue. An example of such issues would be concerns surrounding international migration. Systematic research on 'Temporary Migration of Natural Persons' for instance could benefit both parties in trade negotiations.

In order to reap the benefit of association with NGOs that TEC may opt for, it is important to ensure that such involvement is not of a peripheral or cosmetic nature. It presupposes a kind of facilitating and mentoring role for TEC that would be qualitatively different from the other more conventional modes of functioning that TEC has been used to so far. It is possible to think of a catalyst role for TEC for bringing together NGOs and research organizations in fruitful alliances where each may be seen to play a complementary role to the other.

¹⁵ See Appendix, Second Technical Report of LATN II.

That such partnerships can indeed bear fruit can be seen from some of the interesting work that is already being tried out elsewhere.¹⁶

The need for NGO involvement of course should not be seen as an advocacy for involving any or all NGOs and activist groups. Perhaps very few among these will have the ability, motivation or the potential to form fruitful alliances with research groups or policy makers to help articulate their concerns in a manner that will eventually smoothen the process of trade negotiations for the greater good of all. If TEC intends to work with NGOs then it is absolutely essential that it uses a proper *sifting mechanism* to identify the ones with potential to contribute as well as to learn from the process, and to weed out the often shrill, often dogmatic actors from this vastly heterogeneous crowd. A PO in the TEC PI, or perhaps at the Centre level can be specially trained with the expertise to systematically monitor the NGO world and identify credible NGOs as potential partners.

There is much more background work that needs to be done in the area of identification, mentoring and technical support than seems to have gone into the efforts that TEC has put in the area of NGO involvement.

V.2 Constraints

Among the constraining factors inhibiting progress, some could be identified as internal to TEC, some as internal to IDRC and some are external to the Center. Much of the constraints falling within the first two groups identified here can be sorted out with some degree of strategic thinking.

V.2.1 Internal to TEC

Within the first group of constraints, one would like to mention the unusually heavy project load on the Team Leader of TEC. The highly ambitious nature of the PI which is apparent from the wide spread of project themes and the sheer volume of numbers, can by itself be looked upon as a constraint, unless matched by requisite person power. It is desirable that the Team Leader is left with some free time to strategize for program level developments rather than be totally bogged down by project level work.

A related constraint which may have potentially serious implications in terms of the intrinsic logic and coherence of the PI is the absence of a fully spelt out program design for TEC. The Prospectus provides a clear statement of project objectives, but does not offer equally clear statements on other dimensions of the project. The strategies outlined in the Prospectus are a mixed bag of elements: some are strategies proper, while others are more in the nature of a set of suggestions on new themes, new areas of operation and new modes of functioning. Nor are these spelt out in the context of the challenges and constraints that define the feasible set of options. Without such an overarching program design, one may run the risk of chaotic growth.

¹⁶ See Winters and Mehta, 2003

V.2.2 Internal to IDRC

Among those constraints that may be deemed to fall outside the periphery of TEC but are internal to IDRC, is the need for a corporate policy statement on inter-PI linkages. This is perhaps something that may already exist. If indeed it does, then it may be useful to invoke such thinking to provide guidelines on how best to operationalize inter-PI linkages to derive maximum benefit from cross-fertilization of ideas while at the same time cutting down costs.

V.2.3 External to IDRC

Given that TEC works in the area of international trade, by design it is situated in an environment that is inherently volatile, especially now that the rules of the game are in the process of being formulated in an increasingly liberalizing world. The ever shifting face of politics in the developing world is also something that TEC has to constantly contend with. The other facet of the environment on which TEC has no control is the wide divergence in research and policy making milieu between different countries and different regions of the developing world that projects are located. No single method or strategy can work in all regions and under all circumstances. The challenge is to constantly be on one's toes and to learn to draw lessons from the varied experience of how various strategic interventions have worked under varied conditions. The saving grace is that TEC's major mandate is to support credible research. This has stood in good stead even under extremely volatile political conditions. By and large TEC has taken these in its strides and weathered the challenges reasonably well.

V.3 Program and Project Development Initiatives

V.3.1 Program Development

The TEC team has spent a lot of effort on 'program development' as is evident from a large number of workshops that the PI has organized and the number of scoping studies it has commissioned out for the purpose. Leaving out the RSP activities that are purely travel-related, workshops and scoping studies for program development together constitute a significantly high proportion of all RSPs under TEC. Within the period under review, TEC has commissioned out scoping studies on 'TEC Programming and Partnership Opportunities in the MENA region', on 'Development and Research Priorities in MENA', on the 'Western and Central African Trade Network (WACATN)', on ESARO, and on 'Intellectual Property Protection regime in Africa' among others. Workshops on program development have been held on 'Trade Policy', on 'Internationalizing Competition Policy: Developing Country Perspectives', on 'Research Needs and Priorities on Trade and Health Services in LAC', on 'Trade in Health Services in MENA Region', over and above the several internal TEC meetings for program development and an equally large number of workshops for project development.

This clearly suggests that not merely that there is a felt need for this kind of activity, it also shows the responsiveness of the program management to changing contexts and opportunities. A clearly articulated program design is likely to have considerably enhanced the effectiveness of such activities from the point of view of program development.

A holistic thematic program design for TEC may have been useful to strengthen the program in other ways as well. For instance, it could have been useful in removing the ambiguity created by the uneasy coexistence of the themes of 'Employment' and 'Competitiveness' on par with 'Trade' in the title of the PI, when it is clear to all that the former two themes have a rightful place within TEC if and only if they are linked with international trade in some manner.¹⁷ The continued presence of these terms in the title breeds ambiguity which may take its toll in insidious ways. A recent project on 'Globalisation, Labour Market and Inequality in Asia' proposes to analyse labour market data from three Asian countries where 'globalisation' provides only the peripheral context. Although in the perception of the Team, trade is the primary, if not the only focal point of the TEC agenda, one wonders if this project would have gotten the green signal at all if it were not for the fact that it is on the theme of 'Employment'. The need for greater clarity is manifest in other ways as well. There is far more emphasis in the program on Competition Policy as opposed to competitiveness, which forms the topic of inquiry only in a couple of smaller projects in Northern Africa. Without a clear articulation of the overall program design, such ambiguities may continue.

V.3.2 Strategic interventions in project development

There is ample evidence that the TEC program personnel have been strategically involved in assessing the nature and extent of requisite support in different projects, and then providing such support, whenever needed, to assist project teams to develop activities in desired directions. Although most of such program support tends to get concentrated towards the beginning of project lives, the team has been vigilant at monitoring progress and providing assistance to projects whenever there has been a perceived need. What is commendable is that all this has been done in an atmosphere of participation, with a minimal degree of unsolicited intervention, providing enough elbow room for the projects to develop, and ensuring that by and large, in the perception of the project partners, the ownership is divested in them.

A number of instances can be cited on how this has been done in various projects. In case of one of TEC's most successful Networks, LATN II, gentle nudgings from the TEC personnel has been perceived by the project management to have resulted in greater effort towards policy-relevant dissemination effort of research results, thereby considerably raising the utility of the research carried out under the auspices of the network.

¹⁷ On a lighter vein, the other, perhaps easier option would be to change the title of the PI. However, although that may have solved the problem of an identity crisis for TEC, it would still need an overall design for itself.

In the VERN project in Vietnam, the involvement of external consultants in an advisory capacity was ensured within a mutually agreeable structure, so that the technical expertise of the external experts could be fruitfully brought to bear on the economic issues that would be identified and investigated by Vietnamese researchers themselves. TEC also succeeded in persuading the project management to endorse a transparent and (partially) competitive structure for research undertakings: a procedure which is quite revolutionary in the Vietnamese research community. The ownership and control in the VERN project has now been invested in the VERN team located at the Institute of Economics at Hanoi, thereby delegating power as well as responsibility to the Vietnamese. This is quite different from the arrangement under the VEEM project, the precursor to VERN, which was dependent on the local IDRC office, at a time when it was felt that the project was not ready for the transfer of ownership.

The use of Northern expertise in the form of technical support in projects that are situated in southern institutions is a potentially good method for arriving at a North-South balance that has been alluded to earlier in this report. However, caution needs to be exercised to ensure that the nature of the support that is being provided is genuinely complementary to the expertise that is available in the South, whether such support comes at the proposal selection stage (as was done for the project on 'Globalisation, Labour Market and Inequality in Asia') or through out the life of selected projects (as is being envisaged under the VERN project). An example of where this modality may turn out to be risky is when the proposed research is heavily data dependent and a North-based technical advisor is unaware of the availability of requisite data needed for the suggested analysis. The former project is an example of a case where this may have gone wrong.

V.3.3 Articulating the Program Design

In operationalizing its mandate, TEC appears to be constantly trying to strike a balance between various options. Some of these options are explicit while others are not. Given that by and large the substantive or realized content of the PI at any point of time is determined by the content of the projects, clearly, the perceived need for program level 'balance' would be ensured at the project selection level, or later, through suggested revisions in work plans. Some of the options that the PI appears to be constantly balancing itself over are between:

- Objectives (capacity building, policy influence, and ensuring coherence between domestic and trade policies)
- Positioning ('weaker' vs. 'stronger' research and policy environments);
- Situating projects regionally (Latin America, Africa, Asia or global);
- Issue-based concerns (new or old trade issues; 'niche' issues);
- Modalities (networks, academic institutions or NGOs);
- Riskiness (high or low risk projects) ; and

- Partners (South or North-based; within the latter, Canadian or non-Canadian).¹⁸

While some of these options, such as the one on the balance between Southern and Northern-based researchers, may to some extent be influenced by suggestions from the level of the Centre which may have remained unchanged over the review period, in each of the others, the PI exercises considerable freedom to exercise its options. It appears that TEC has implicitly taken the decision that “balance itself is an important goal”.¹⁹

It may be recalled that both the earlier evaluations had suggested otherwise. Given that trying to maintain a balance simultaneously along several fronts by itself has its costs, the PI has to decide for itself along which dimensions and to what extent such balance needs to be maintained for greater effectiveness towards reaching the objectives of the program. If indeed it is felt that there is a need for balance along all these dimensions, then it is better that it is made more explicit.

As pointed out in various sections of this report, much thinking on options have already gone into these issues, at various PI internal meetings and in the shape of different program development activities. Although some fresh thinking may be needed on some options, as those posed by perceived riskiness of projects,²⁰ the Team has already invested much by way of balancing the various options. It is important at this stage that these are clearly articulated and decisions taken at a broad level on the future course of action of the PI. This is likely to ensure greater effectiveness of the considerable effort that is spent by the Team in reaching program objectives.

Such a program design would have to spell out the kind of portfolio of projects that TEC wishes to support over time, along with a set of strategies and the likely risks and gains associated with them in the regions and environments that it chooses to operate, keeping in view the objectives of the project. The nature and extent of balance along some dimensions, and its absence in others, will then emerge as the result of a conscious and articulated decision taken by the Team.

The Team Leader may consider shedding some of her project burden to invest more time in this direction. The externalities of this endeavour for the benefit of program development are likely to be worth the cost of giving up of her personal involvement in a project or two.

¹⁸ To this list one could add the implicit need for some degree of balance between the three themes of trade, employment and competitiveness, although in the judgement and perception of the Team, employment and competitiveness are supplementary and ‘experimental’ sub-themes.

¹⁹ E-mail communication from the Team Leader, dated 19 December 2003.

²⁰ It may be noted in this context that a risky project is in principle different from a project embedded in a research- or policy- poor environment. Riskiness has to do with the variance of the outcome distribution, not the mean, although a low average value for outcome or output indicators may very well co-exist with a low mean value.

VI. Summary and Conclusions

TEC is a cerebral and an ambitious program : ever vigilant of changing environment, spreading into many thematic areas, regions and activities. This can be a great source of strength, in so far as such expansion is orderly and well thought out.

During the period under review, the PI has made steady progress towards the general objective of raising the effectiveness of developing countries' participation in the global economy. This is being done primarily through the process of strengthening the negotiating ability of the partners. The major input has been in terms of investment in raising the potential quality of debates through relevant research in trade policy matters and its dissemination to the policy making community and other stakeholders.

The TEC Prospectus has identified three specific objectives for the PI. These are conceived as building indigenous research capacity, enhancing the policy relevance of research and ensuring better coherence of domestic and trade policies in developing countries. While in a timeless, constraint-free environment, the synergies between the three objectives may appear to be high, for a particular project at a given point of time, given limited human and financial resources, there can very well be significant tensions between the three objectives. Yet with proper planning and foresight, and some imagination, some of these tensions and trade-offs can indeed be synergized into win-win situations, and TEC has indeed been successful in achieving this in a number of its constituent projects.

TEC has taken note of past reviews and their recommendations seriously and proactively. This is evident from the deliberations that have taken place in the team meetings. The several Project and Program Development workshops that TEC has conducted in the last three years and the manner in which some of these recommendations have been incorporated in program activities also bear testimony to this.

Although there are variations across projects, by and large TEC has done well in terms of the quality and quantity of output, as well as the outcomes and outreach of the program. It has been able to make the program much more policy relevant during the period under review by increasing the dissemination of output to target stakeholders such as policy makers and civil society. This is evident from the greater emphasis that is being put in recent times on production of policy briefs and the increased use of the internet for dissemination of research outputs.

A major outcome of the TEC program initiative has been the forging of links within the research community in developing countries to orient the community towards coordinated research on international trade-related issues. This has been done in situations where the basic research expertise may have already existed to a certain extent. In situations where such expertise did not exist to start with, TEC has helped develop such expertise and linkages through networking. One of the major process outcomes of the project has been to link

up 'weaker' partners and environments with stronger ones to reap scale economies and to benefit from demonstration effects.

There is ample evidence that the TEC program personnel have been strategically involved in assessing the nature and extent of requisite support in different projects, and then providing such support, whenever needed, to assist project teams to develop activities in desired directions.

TEC operates in challenging environments. One major challenge that the PI faces, and one on which the PI has no control, is a result of the fact that it works in the area of international trade, an area which is inherently volatile, especially now that the rules of the game are in the process of being formulated in an increasingly liberalizing world. The ever shifting face of politics in the developing world is also something that TEC has to constantly contend with. The fact that TEC is located in three continents which are widely different from one another in terms of both research capacity as well as policy environment, is also a challenge by itself. TEC has used a range of strategies and modalities to handle these challenges. Networking among researchers is one modality which has been used by TEC under diverse conditions, mostly with great success.

The Prospectus suggests that one of the modalities that TEC needs to consider is to work with NGOs and civil society groups. This makes sense in the context of the changing nature of trade negotiations, where these groups are becoming an increasingly prominent and vocal force to reckon with.

There is evidence that in the period under review TEC has already taken some bold steps to take on the challenge, albeit with mixed success. In view of the fact that TEC's major partner has been, and continues to be, the research community, working with NGOs is a relatively new challenge for TEC. However given the likely pay-offs, TEC may consider equipping itself adequately to handle the challenges of working with this new breed of partners.

TEC has also made some progress in including gender perspectives in its activities. This has been done in terms of including a couple of women-centered projects and a gender training program within the portfolio, and through the inclusion of women in research teams. With some focused efforts, more can perhaps be done in this area.

The TEC team has spent a lot of effort on 'program development' as is evident from a large number of workshops that the PI has organized and the number of scoping studies it has commissioned out for the purpose. While this demonstrates the responsiveness of the program management to changing contexts and opportunities, it also suggests that there is a felt need for this kind of activity.

In this context it is suggested that the PI may spend some effort on developing a more fully articulated program design than is currently available to the Team. Such a design may spell out the overall structure of the program where the component projects may be looked upon as building blocks within an organically linked entity. It would also provide guidance on the kind of portfolio of projects

that TEC wishes to support over time, along with the likely risks and gains associated with them in the regions and environments that it chooses to operate in, keeping in view the objectives of the program as a whole.

One of the TEC priorities, if not explicitly articulated, but something that is implicit in the way it functions, is maintaining a 'balance' between the options it has along several dimensions of choice. In the absence of a fully spelt out design, with associated analysis of risks and gains of different options chosen, such balancing becomes a goal in itself, thereby potentially reducing the overall effectiveness of the program.

An articulated overall design may also identify 'subsidiary' themes that are linked with international trade in the new era of globalization, many of which are already specified in the Prospectus. These subsidiary themes can also provide opportunities for developing projects with substantive overlaps with other PI's, thereby promoting inter-PI linkages.

The Team Leader may consider shedding some of her project burden to invest more time in this direction. The externalities of this endeavour for the benefit of program development are likely to be worth the opportunity cost of her personal involvement in a project or two.

Annex I : List of Documents

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Annex II : List of persons interviewed

Vijay Vyas	Independent Expert, Jaipur, India
Roy Culpeper	President, The North South Institute, Ottawa
Ann Weston	Vice President & Research Coordinator, The North South Institute, Ottawa
Rodney Schmidt	Senior Economist, The North South Institute, Ottawa
Remco H. Oostendorp	Economist, Economic and Social Institute, Free University, The Netherlands

IDRC

Rohinton Medhora	Vice-President, Program, IDRC
Susan Joeques	Team Leader, TEC, IDRC
Andres Rius	Team Member, TEC, IDRC, Montevideo
Gerret Rusnak	Team Member, TEC, IDRC, Ottawa
Anyck Dauphin	Team Member, TEC, IDRC, Ottawa

MERCOSUR & LATN

Jose M. Fanelli	Project Co-ordinator, MERCOSUR Centro de Estudios de Estado y Sociedad, Argentina
Daniel Chudnovsky	Project Co-ordinator, MERCOSUR, Centro de Investigaciones para la Trasnformacion (CENIT), Argentina
Fernando Lorenzo	Director, Centro de Investigaciones Economicas (Cinve), Montevideo, Uruguay
Fernando Gonzalez Guyer	Coordinador General, Red de Investigaciones Economicas del Merosur, Montevideo- Uruguay
Marcel Vaillant	Universidad de la Republica Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Departamento De Economia, Montevideo- Uruguay

Silvia Laens	Economista – Investigadora, Centro de Investigaciones Económicas (Cinve), Montevideo, Uruguay
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Vietnam

Dr. Do Hoai Nam	President, National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities, Member, National Assembly Member, Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam
Nguyen Thang	Researcher, Institute of Economics, Hanoi Coordinator, VERN Project
Trang Quoc Trung	Expert, Department of Industry, Ministry of Planning and Investment, Govt. of Vietnam Team Leader of Sub Project, VERN
Pham Thi Anh Thyet	Institute of Economics Member, Local Technical Assistance Team, VERN
Dang Nhu Van	Institute of Economics Macroeconomics Division
Le Mai Huong	Researcher, The Centre for Rural Progress, Hanoi
Le Thuc Duc	Institute of Information Technology, Hanoi
Tran Minh Ngoc	Head, Deptt of Gender & Development, Institute of Economics, Hanoi
Phan Him Nhat Minh	Research Centre of Vocational Training Team Member of Sub Project, VERN

Annex III : Details of Field Visits, Report Preparation and Short Bio-Data of Reviewers

Field Visits

In all, four projects were selected for field visits for in-depth analysis. The selection was made in consultation with the Evaluation Unit and the Team Leader of TEC. The field trip in Latin America was made by both the reviewers. In addition, each reviewer made one field visit separately. Details are given below:

Member of the Review Team	Project Visited	Dates of Travel
Swapna Mukhopadhyay	LATN Buenos Aires, Argentina & Red MERCOSUR Montevideo, Uruguay	22 nd July, 2003 to 1 st August, 2003
“	VERN Hanoi, Vietnam	3 rd September, 2003 to 5 th September, 2003
Jean Paul Azam	LATN Buenos Aires, Argentina & MERCOSUR Montevideo, Uruguay	22 nd July, 2003 to 1 st August, 2003
“	COMESA Zambia	

Bio Data and Some Publications of Swapna Mukhopadhyay

Swapna Mukhopadhyay had obtained her doctoral degree in economics from MIT, USA in 1973. She has Masters Degrees from Calcutta and Yale Universities. She has taught economics in Calcutta University in India, North Eastern University in USA and Sydney University in Australia. She had been a Professor of Economics at the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi University since 1973 before she joined the Institute of Social Studies Trust as its Director in 1994. She held that post until July 2003. Dr. Mukhopadhyay has been the program coordinator for the Human Resource Development Program at UN-APDC in 1983-1985, was Senior Consultant at UN-ESCAP in 1993-1994. She has consulted for many other international organizations.

Dr. Mukhopadhyay has published several articles and books on various issues in development economics including poverty, labour markets and gender issues. Titles of some of the books written and edited by her are : *Tracking Gender Development under Economic Reforms : Continuity and Change in South Asia*, (Edited with Ratna Sudarshan; 2003), *Living under a Shadow, Gender Dimensions of HIV/AIDS (ISST,2000)*, *‘Women’s Health, Public Policy and Community Action’*. (ed.,1998); *‘In the Name of Justice: Women and Law in*

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Bio Data Jean Paul Azam